

The University of Chicago

THE BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF MAJOR JONES'S COURTSHIP

PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
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The Background and Significance Of Major Jones's Courtship

BY HENRY PRENTICE MILLER*

William Tappan Thompson's early humorous sketches about Florida and Georgia rustics had been well received.¹ By early 1842 he had written one story about Pineville which had gone the rounds of the newspapers.² But Thompson had so little opinion of his first Major Jones letter that he published it anonymously (a departure from his previous method of publication) in the smallest type used by the periodical of which he was co-editor.³ That he had no well conceived purpose or plot when he began this series of letters and was not prepared for the popularity which came at the outset is further shown by his own comments:

Having written and published anonymously a letter by Joseph Jones in the "Companion" [*Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror* of Macon, Georgia], which proved very popular, greatly to my surprise, I determined to continue the letters in the "Miscellany" [*Southern Miscellany*, a weekly newspaper in Madison, Georgia] with a view to adapt the paper to a local country circulation. I had originally no plot or plan for the letters which finally grew into a sort of narrative to which, when I was urged by friends to put them into book form, I gave the title of "Major Jones' Courtship."⁴

The preface to the original publication of the first letter indicates that one motive was Thompson's apology and defense of his homespun sketches and at the same time a protest against

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1. "Judge Lynch Outwitted," first published in *Augusta Mirror*, I, 174 (February 23, 1839), had found its way into newspapers throughout the country to such an extent that eighteen months after original publication Thompson protested that it had been "yankedised at the east, hoosierised at the west, cockneyised and niggerised at the north." See *Augusta Mirror*, III, 47 (November 28, 1840). "My First and Last Fire Hunt," the author's first portrait of a poor-white, originally published in *Augusta Mirror*, II, 37-8 (July 13, 1839), readily found its way into *Spirit of the Times*, IX, 341 (September 21, 1839), where its realism was praised unqualifiedly. See *ibid.*, IX, 511 (December 28, 1839). For a fuller discussion of Thompson's earlier works, see Chapter II of Henry Prentice Miller, "The Life and Works of William Tappan Thompson" (unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, 1942).

2. "Great Attraction! or the Doctor 'Most Oudaciously Tuck In,'" *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, I, 364-70 (March, 1842). Editor Hanleiter, for instance, had made it the leading article in the *Southern Miscellany*, April 12, 1842.

3. *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, II, 191-2 (June, 1842).

4. Letter to Salem Dutcher, October 16, 1866, now in the possession of Mrs. Lewis E. McIntosh of Quitman, Georgia.

some of the current sentimental poetry and its enthusiastic admirers.⁵

As newly appointed editor of the *Southern Miscellany*, he set himself to the task of increasing the circulation of that newspaper by writing additional Major Jones letters which would please and amuse the sober-minded middle class farmers in the county and environs. His sole purpose was popularity, and this he hoped to achieve with wholesome fun which would portray Southern rustic life and character "with no more exaggeration than was necessary to give distinctiveness to the picture."⁶ The honest expression of his utilitarian purpose in the preface to the first edition of the book should have pleased his worldly minded readers because of its Franklin-like candor:

They [other authors] all feel a monstrous desire to benefit the public one way or another — some is anxious to tell all they know about certain matters, jest for the good of the public—some wants to edify the public—some has been swaded by friends to give ther book to the public—and others has been induced to publish ther ritings jest for the benefit of futer generations—but not one of 'em ever had a idee to make a cent for themselves! Now, none of these excuses dont zactly meet my case. I dont spose the public—cept it is them as is courtin—will be much benefited by readin my letters—I'm sure Mr. Hanleiter [owner of the *Southern Miscellany*] wouldn't went to all the expense jest to please his friends, and for my part I'm perfectly willin to let posterity rite ther own books. So I don't see any other way then to jest out with the naked truth—and that is, that my book was made jest to get subscribers to the "Southern Miscellany," one of the cheapest, handsomest and best papers in the country. Ther aint a lie in the book and I'm terminated ther shant be in the preface, and that's the reason I say *one of the best*.⁷

Thompson later stated that he had aimed primarily at amusement in his efforts "to give variety and local interest in the columns of a Georgia country newspaper."⁸ Since he had anticipated only "a home circulation and an ephemeral existence"⁹

5. "We are no sonneteers, and therefore, have no fair correspondent, 'Inez,' to address us in terms of praise and adulation of our work—to 'almost dance with joy' at our beautiful, exquisitely beautiful *tout ensemble*;"—whose lively sympathies for us would constrain her to exclaim, "If, if the southern public will not sustain this work, I shall despair of ever seeing a successful effort made *amongst us*." We have no such dear sweet creature of fancy as this, but we have a staunch homespun friend in Major Jos. Jones of Pineville, whose communication, to which we give place below, if not quite so flattering as that of 'Inez,' to our contemporary, will we hope be found equally interesting to the reader." *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, II, 191 (June, 1842).

6. *Major Jones's Courtship* (New York, 1872), 7. Unless otherwise specified, all future footnotes about this book will refer to this edition.

7. *Major Jones' Courtship* (Madison, Georgia, 1843), [iii]. The only extant copy now known of this, the first edition, is in the Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

8. *Major Jones' Courtship* (New York, 1872), [5].

9. *Ibid.*

for these letters, he wrote them first to entertain the members of the rural community and afterwards to influence their political views.¹⁰ So far as Thompson's own purpose is concerned, then, these letters should first be interpreted against the background of the readers whom he sought to please—chiefly the hard-working, half-educated, rough-and-ready Scotch-Irish cotton farmers and their families, who, according to one well respected authority, made middle Georgia the center of the "most unique civilization" America had produced,¹¹ a democratic land where there was a perfect understanding between the blacks and the whites, a section where there were no hard-and-fast class distinctions.¹²

The literary background of *Major Jones's Courtship* requires considerable comment. Longstreet with his strong personality and his popular *Georgia Scenes* was certainly one influence and inspiration to guide Thompson into writing about rural life in Georgia.¹³ The young author, furthermore, was well acquainted with the Jack Downing letters,¹⁴ with J. W. McClintock's stories about Johnny Beedle's sleigh ride, courtship, and marriage,¹⁵ with the Jotham Hotchkiss Yankee dialect letters,¹⁶ and with

10. Four letters which were never published in book form wholly concern Georgia politics. See *Southern Miscellany*, December 1, 8, 22, 1843; January 26, 1844.

11. Joel Chandler Harris' letter to E. L. Burlingame, quoted by Julia Collier Harris, *The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris* (Boston, 1918), 317.

12. Editorial of Joel Chandler Harris, quoted by Julia Collier Harris, *Joel Chandler Harris, Editor and Essayist* (Chapel Hill, 1931), 125. The same point of view is expressed by Richard Malcolm Johnston in "Middle Georgia Rural Life," *Century Magazine*, XLIII, 737-42 (March, 1892). Both Harris and Johnston were born and raised in middle Georgia.

13. Thompson had studied law under Longstreet and had managed a printing establishment for him. See Miller, "Thompson," Chapter I, for an account of the close personal relations of these two men. Major Jones was flattered when someone advertised the *Courtship* as from Longstreet's pen. See *Courtship*, Letter XXI. Professor John Donald Wade, *Augustus Baldwin Longstreet* (New York, 1924), 165, goes so far as to say that *Major Jones's Courtship* is an imitation of Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*. Bernard De Voto accepts Longstreet's influence upon Thompson and points out the continuity of this literature in Thompson's personal relations to Joel Chandler Harris. *Mark Twain's America* (Boston, 1932), 97.

14. Several Jack Downing letters (by Seba Smith and imitators) had been printed in the Tallahassee *Floridian*, November 2, 1833, and January 18, 1834, at a time when Thompson was living in Tallahassee. Others letters were reprinted in the *State Rights' Sentinel* when Thompson was an assistant to Longstreet. See issues of June 5, September 15, 1834; February 23, March 27, May 1, 19, 1835. When Thompson was co-editor of the *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, the May, 1842, issue (the one preceding the publication of the first Major Jones letter) reprinted a long article which praised the Jack Downing letters, especially their realism. Serious-minded people constantly asked Seba Smith about Jack Downing's health.

15. The Johnny Beedle courtship letter was published in the Tallahassee *Floridian* on November 1, 1831, when Thompson lived in Tallahassee. The same letter is found in the *State Rights' Sentinel* on September 8, 1835. Beedle's Thanksgiving letter is found in the issue of July 22, 1836. The book *Johnny Beedle's Sleigh Ride, Courtship, and Marriage*, was published in 1841.

16. A Jotham Hotchkiss Yankee dialect letter was reprinted in the *Southern Miscellany*, May 3, 1842.

Oliver Hillhouse Prince's "Militia Drill," a sketch which had gone the rounds for years and so afforded a ready model for a letter about the Pineville militia.¹⁷

There was, moreover, a strong non-literary tradition and practice for using the letter form.¹⁸ Governmental, political, and news letters were found regularly in the columns of the newspapers. But far closer to the Major Jones letters were the local letters written either by semi-illiterates or others who chose to write to the editor through that medium.¹⁹ Such letters evidently had an appeal, or they would not be found in virtually every newspaper of the period. In them is found a very close analogue to the form of Thompson's letters. The young author, it is seen, had ample precedent, both literary and non-literary, for his *Courtship* letters.

At least much of the subject matter of the letters was indigenous to middle Georgia. There was first of all, a strong tradition that a young man named Wall, a native of Pineville, Georgia, told Thompson many humorous stories about his native village.²⁰ But more important are Thompson's own remarks about the materials which he used in these letters: "Many of the points in the 'Courtship' were suggested by local incidents, and when I revised the copy for publication in book form I struck out many things of a purely local character which I now think were quite as worthy of perpetuation as much of which I retained."²¹

Major Jones declared in his preface that there was not a lie in his book.²² Mrs. Stallings refused to let her grandson be named for a character in a novel because novels were "all lies from eend to eend."²³ If the major and Mrs. Stallings meant

17. This sketch was first published in the Washington, Georgia, *Monitor* on June 6, 1807. Longstreet, after acknowledging that it was not his own work but that of a friend, included it in the *Georgia Scenes*.

18. For a discussion of this point, see Walter Blair, *Native American Humor (1800-1900)* (New York, 1937), 58.

19. See, for instance, the "Simon Backwoods" letter in the *State Rights' Sentinel*, February 16, 1836. The March 8, 1836, issue has a semi-illiterate letter about the "Fansa Ball in Augusty." Thompson printed and commented with gusto upon a "genuine morceau" which he said was "of indigenous growth": "Stoling from Sara _____ a Scream Colored hors on the 29. day of July 1842. Discription—his tail is—white and heavy his main is the same" *Southern Miscellany*, August 27, 1842. Thompson clearly had a fondness for such writing.

20. See Miller, "Thompson," Chapter II, for an account of this tradition. Wall was supposed to have come to Augusta, Georgia, to study medicine and to have boarded in the same home with Thompson. Wall was reputedly the original of Cousin Pete in the *Courtship*.

21. Letter to Salem Dutcher, October 16, 1866.

22. *Major Jones' Courtship* (Madison), p. [iii].

23. *Courtship*, Letter XXVI.

the same thing by the word *lie*, Thompson was stating that his book was based on fact instead of fiction. Some verification of this idea is found by the innumerable parallels between events in the *Courtship* and events recorded in the regular columns of the *Southern Miscellany*: the seasonal activities of Major Jones on his farm correspond to those of the farmers near Madison; the abnormally cold spring of 1843;²⁴ the two Mr. Thompsons who then lived in Madison;²⁵ the famous Negro waiter who used pseudo-Chesterfieldian language;²⁶ general excitement over the Millerites;²⁷ the furor which Dickens' *Notes* created;²⁸ the famous comet of 1843;²⁹ the earthquake which frightened Madison;³⁰ the scandal about a jury which freed a band of bank robbers in Columbus, Georgia;³¹ public examinations at the Female College in Macon;³² Thompson's attack on the Griffins for whom he had worked in Macon;³³ his quarrels with the editor of the *Athens Whig*;³⁴ his visit to a University of Georgia commencement;³⁵ general public interest over animal magnetism;³⁶ various puffs for the *Southern Miscellany*;³⁷ for the Madison edition of the *Courtship*;³⁸ and for a proposed weekly humorous magazine.³⁹ The three topics which seem to have attracted the most

24. *Courtship*, Letter XVII. See *Southern Miscellany*, March 25, 1843.

25. *Courtship*, Letter VIII. The second Mr. Thompson was in charge of constructing the railroad from Madison to what was to become Atlanta. See Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook, now in the possession of Mrs. Lewis E. McIntosh of Quitman, Georgia.

26. *Courtship*, Letter VII. See George White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia* (Savannah, 1849), 435. The anonymous author of *Kuphs of Kauphy* (Athens, Georgia, 1853), wrote a delightful sketch about the wit and suavity of this Negro.

27. *Courtship*, Letters XI, XIII, XIV. See *Southern Miscellany*, January 28, 1843.

28. *Courtship*, Letter XI. See *Southern Miscellany*, November 26, 1842.

29. *Courtship*, Letter XVII. See *Southern Miscellany*, March 25, 1843.

30. *Courtship*, Letter XIII, in which Major Jones's wedding is temporarily postponed. See *Southern Miscellany*, January 7, 1843.

31. *Courtship*, Letter XX. See *Southern Miscellany*, June 3, 1843.

32. *Courtship*, Letter IV. See especially *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, II, 251-5 (July, 1842).

33. *Southern Miscellany*, August 27, 1842, has a postscript omitted from the book in which Major Jones says that the Griffins must be something "tween the fox and the weasel." See *Southern Miscellany*, August 20, 1842, for Thompson's own lengthy attack on the Griffins.

34. *Southern Miscellany*, August 12, 1843, has *Courtship* Letter XXII with some differences from the book, among them this remark by Major Jones: "I kep a lookout for that belly-potent man what you've been keeping up sich a everlastin war with in the 'Miscellany'." See also *Southern Miscellany*, June 24, 1843.

35. *Courtship*, Letter XXII. See *Southern Miscellany*, August 5, 1843.

36. *Courtship*, Letter IV. See *State Rights' Sentinel*, May 5, 1835.

37. *Courtship*, Letter II. See *Southern Miscellany*, May 20, 1843.

38. *Courtship*, Letter XVIII. See *Southern Miscellany*, May 20, 1843.

39. The Madison edition of the *Courtship*, Letter XII, has this statement by Major Jones: "If I was certain that a rite spunky little little paper, full of fun and good pieces, could git scribes enuf at sich a low price, to pay the cost and trouble, I'd go into it like a two-year-old in a cane-break." See *Southern Miscellany*, January 7, 1843.

attention were women's bustles,⁴⁰ men's fashionable wearing of full beards and "soaplocks,"⁴¹ and the fanatic and ever-zealous Washingtonians,⁴² with tobacco chewing a close competitor.⁴³ Thompson finally lowered Major Jones to the position of his political mouthpiece.⁴⁴ Such a list of parallels clearly indicates that Thompson to a great extent was using topical middle Georgia materials as the subject matter and background of *Major Jones's Courtship*.

Many of the incidents in the Major Jones letters appear to be derived from ordinary life. The author, it would seem, merely

40. *Courtship*, Letters XXII, XXIII. See *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, II, 374 (September, 1842), and also *Southern Miscellany*, October 8, 1842.

41. *Courtship*, Letters VIII, XXII-XXIV. Thompson was constantly violent on the subjects of bustles and "soaplocks": "It is fashionable now-a-days to talk of bustles, and it is no rare thing to see a biped exquisite of the male gender poke away the wilderness of frizzled hair that encumbers his upper story, and thrusting out his phiz—which we can only liken to the nose of a mouse peering out of a mat of ocum—exclaim, 'Oie considaw them bustles demd vulgaw defawmtois—perfectlaw widiculous—demd immitations.' The creature speaks the truth—but could he hear the remarks that are sometimes made by the fair deformed, if he did not first remove the mote from his *own* eye, as we are commanded in the good book, he would be very apt to pull or cut away the hair from about his calabash, before he attempted to remove the wool, feathers, bran, or whatever it may be, of which these same bustles are composed. In Greensborough [a neighboring town] the other Sabbath, a barber's block of this sort was gliding into church in the most graceful manner, when the following conversation was overheard on one of the ladies' benches.' The ladies made derogatory remarks about the dandy and concluded that he had enough hair on his head to stuff two bustles. *Southern Miscellany*, November 19, 1842. Their initial fright at seeing the dandy should be compared with Mary's in the *Courtship*, Letter XXII. Thompson gave in an editorial his own description of the fashionable dress in Athens: "We saw whiskers and soaplocks of all fashions, sizes and hues, and not a few mountainous deformities of the female form that would have made a dromedary blush" *Southern Miscellany*, August 5, 1843. See also a Savannah correspondent's lengthy article, *ibid.*, December 3, 1842.

42. *Courtship*, Letters VII, XVI, XXI. The Washingtonians, a Temperance society established by reformed drunkards, were very popular in middle Georgia. A full treatment of this subject may be found in Henry Anselm Scomp, *King Alcohol in the Realm of King Cotton, 1733-1887* ([Chicago] 1888), 355-408. Longstreet was active in the cause of Temperance. Wade, *Longstreet*, 139 ff. Temperance songs were popular in Georgia. *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, II, 255 (July, 1842). The *Southern Miscellany* is filled with articles in praise of the Washingtonians (May 14, June 18, July 2, 9, 1842; July 8, 1843). Richard P. Taylor, a leading Washingtonian, spoke throughout Georgia, including Madison, in 1842. Scomp, *King Alcohol*, 370. The *Southern Miscellany*, June 18, 1842, announced that *The Washingtonians, or Total Abstinence Advocate* was beginning publication in Augusta. The July 9, 1842, issue of the *Southern Miscellany* carried a full account of the July 4 cold water celebration of the Washingtonians in Madison. Cf. *Courtship*, Letter XXI.

43. *Courtship*, Letter I. Thompson's strong disapproval of tobacco chewing is seen in his comments on "Tirtium Quid's" article "Confessions of a Tobacco Chewer," *Augusta Mirror*, III, 15 (October 3, 1840). Such a sentence as "We would especially recommend the Confessions of a Tobacco Chewer to the attention of such young 'Georgia Majors,' as have not yet graduated in all the degrees of gentility" is at least a hint of the *Courtship*, Letter I.

44. *Southern Miscellany*, December 1, 8, 22, 1843; January 26, 1844. Georgia had two very strong political parties at this time—the Democrats and the Whigs. Both Hanleiter and Thompson were ardent Whigs; the neutral *Southern Miscellany* changed its editorial policy and became Whig. Major Jones zealously supported Henry Clay for President (*ibid.*, December 1, 1843), General Clinch for Congress (*ibid.*, December 8, 1843), Alexander H. Stephens (*ibid.*, January 26, 1844), but attacked President Tyler (*ibid.*, December 22, 1843).

took commonplace events and recorded them in the language and from the point of view of a young rustic. Mishaps and practical jokes such as found in "Skinning the Cat,"⁴⁵ "Brother, I'm Bobbed,"⁴⁶ and "April Fool,"⁴⁷ would occur in any rural community. Candy-pullings and coon-hunts are still social customs in some parts of the South. Major Jones's bashfulness, his jealousy, his proposal, his wedding, his honeymoon, the whims of a pregnant wife, the first baby, and the baby's hives are all normal events in the lives of young lovers and married couples, with the exception, perhaps, of the major's unique method of proposing. The subject matter in *Major Jones's Courtship* is so native to the region in which Thompson was living at the time when he wrote it that Joel Chandler Harris, who was born and reared in a neighboring country, declared that the book was a product of middle Georgia rural life.⁴⁸

The epistolary form offered Thompson many advantages. Since letters may be of any length and yet be complete units in themselves, the busy young editor could write a very short letter when pressed for time.⁴⁹ The form, furthermore, gave Thompson a pseudonym, a device which was exceedingly common then for writers of humor and might be aidful should the author incur the ill will of the public. The frequency of genuine letters in the newspapers added to the air of authenticity and verisimilitude, especially among half-educated, gullible readers. By making a rustic countryman the author of these letters, Thompson was able to divorce himself from the hodge-podge of Addisonian essay and dialect found in Longstreet and to employ the American vernacular altogether.⁵⁰ Although by so doing he surrendered the humorous incongruity of formal language juxtaposed to dialect, he obtained an opportunity for full length exploitation of provincial speech and a chance to make the local and provincial background convincing—both to be accomplished through a well developed rustic character who possessed a rambling, "total recall" mind. Thompson avoided monotony by having

45. *Courtship*, Letter V. 46. *Ibid.*, Letter XV. 47. *Ibid.*, Letter XXVIII.

48. Letter to E. L. Burlingame, quoted by Julia Collier Harris, *The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris*, 317.

49. Letter II of the *Courtship* is one page in length; Letter XXIII has ten pages.

50. Joel Chandler Harris pointed out the importance of the vernacular in American humor: "The fact remains that the vernacular, as distinct from literary form and finish, is the natural vehicle of the most persistent and most popular variety of American humor; hence the employment of what is frequently called dialect." *The World's Wit and Humor: American* (New York, 1906, I, xxii)

the rustic quote the conversation of other characters and by having other characters write to Major Jones. The incongruity between the outright seriousness of the rustic writer of the letters on the one hand and the humorous dialect and the ludicrous situations recounted on the other brought wholehearted amusement to both gulled⁵¹ and sophisticated readers.

Major Jones, the apparent author of these letters, may be considered from three different points of view: as a full length individual portrait, as a crackerbox philosopher and representative of middle class plebeian attitudes in Georgia, and as a politician. The major is not a Southern poor-white; he owns a farm and a few slaves, but he is his own overseer and even works in the fields himself on occasion.⁵² His importance in the community is seen in his being the major of the local militia⁵³ and in his being chosen orator for the Fourth of July celebration.⁵⁴ Although his orthography is poor and his grammar is worse, he does have some acquaintance with the Bible, Shakespeare, and Dickens. He is human enough to have some personal flaws, but they are minor. Gambling, hard drinking, brutal fighting, and playing crude practical jokes are not in his life; he, however, swears mildly, chews tobacco until his "catasterfy" occurs, and is jealous of Crotchett without admitting it.⁵⁵ He is bashful, romantic, even sentimental in his courtship, being unable to talk in Mary's presence and believing that he would have frozen to death that night in the bag except for his great love.⁵⁶ One of the shrewdest bits of characterization in the book is found on the occasion when he musters courage through jealousy not to see Mary for a week; time passes so slowly that it seems to him that "the axeltree of the world wanted greasin."⁵⁷ His country bumpkin ignorance exhibits itself when he is afraid to ride on a train and when he eats sparingly at a hotel because he is fearful that there is not sufficient food for everyone.⁵⁸ His human de-

51. Thompson wrote an interesting account of how a pretentious country doctor who lived near Madison was gulled but not pleased by the letters, complaining that "the tarnal fool Jones can't spell and don't know any more about grammar than a mule." The doctor made that statement when he was Thompson's host but did not know who was the author of the letters. Thompson's letter to Salem Dutcher, October 16, 1866.

52. *Courtship, Letters* XXIV, XXVII.

53. *Ibid.*, Letter III. Militia officers in Georgia at this time were elected by the men who composed the companies.

54. *Ibid.*, XXI.

55. *Ibid.*, I, VIII.

56. *Ibid.*, I, XII. The contrast between Major Jones's expression of his romantic love and that found in the sentimental novels of the period added palpably to the humor.

57. *Ibid.*, X. 58. *Ibid.*, VII, XXII.

sire to attract attention is illustrated by his wearing an ornate uniform⁵⁹ and by his "skinning the cat" in a dangerous place.⁶⁰ Chivalric, he shoves Pete into the "branch" for suggesting that Mary is a "sour gall"; but he is tenderhearted enough to regret his impetuosity and is especially sympathetic for Pete when Keziah tricks him into getting into the bag.⁶¹ One very important characteristic which commentators have failed to observe is Major Jones's naive serious-mindedness:⁶² he earnestly warns young men against chewing tobacco; he zealously sets himself to the task of improving literature in Pineville; he ingenuously believes that his book will be aidful to young lovers in their efforts to propose.⁶³ As a staunch Washingtonian he induces at least one drunkard to reform and praises the Temperance Fourth of July celebration in Pineville in which none of the men were "left under the tables for the hogs to root about till they got sober."⁶⁴ As a matter of fact, Major Jones had very little sense of humor: he saw nothing amusing in putting the fire out with tobacco juice, in being thrown from his horse, in practical jokes whether played on him or someone else.⁶⁵ There is a normal maturing in his attitudes as the letters progress: the decidedly romantic and worshipful young lover becomes a loyal husband and a fond father; but he points out in a common sense fashion some of the difficulties and unpleasantness to be found in matrimony.⁶⁶

Unlike the usual amoral or immoral humorous characters of the South and the Southwest of this period, Major Jones is a serious crackerbox philosopher, sometimes exhibiting the strong plebeian prejudices of his class, elsewhere making judicious comments on life. He urges all men to refrain from tobacco or whis-

59. *Ibid.*, III. 60. *Ibid.*, V. 61. *Ibid.*, V, VI, XXV.

62. No little amount of the humor in the *Courtship* arises from the incongruity between Major Jones's constant seriousness and the amusing situations which he relates.

63. *Courtship*, Letters I, II, Preface, p. 10.

64. *Ibid.*, VII, XXI. The characteristic attitude in Southern humor towards liquor is found in such a story as "Mike Fink Beats Davy Crockett at a Shooting Match," Blair, *Native American Humor*, 283-4). The two heroes took "eye-openers," drinks upon getting up in the morning. Following the shooting match, which occurred soon after breakfast, they were ready for "flem-cutters," which would serve as "anti-formatics." Frequently found in other stories is "the elevenner," the man who had to have a drink by eleven in the morning.

65. *Courtship*, Letters I, III, XV, XXVIII. Note this comment in the last letter: "I don't b'lieve in this April foolin. Last year the galls deviled me almost to death with their bominable nonsense, sowin up the legs of my trow-sers, punchin holes in the water gourd, so I wet my shirt bosom all over when I went to drink, and heatin the handle of the tongs, and cuttin the cowhide bottoms of the cheers loose, so I'd fall through 'em when I went to set down, and all sich devilmint. I know the Bible ses there's a time for all things; but I think the least a body has to do with foolish business at any time the better it is for 'em. I'm monstrous tired of sich doings myself."

66. *Ibid.*, XVIII, XXVII..

key.⁶⁷ He ridicules women's enormous but stylish bustles as violations to common sense,⁶⁸ but his favorite topic is the dandy's long whiskers and "soaplocks," monstrosities in the eyes of the middle class.⁶⁹ Another appeal to the bourgeois is the major's attack on book learning: anyone, he observed, could learn how to spell; but "genus comes by natur."⁷⁰ Another appeal to the country people was the major's attack on the farmers who moved to town in the winter, a custom which he called "a fool quality notion."⁷¹ A rustic's attitude is seen in the major's ridicule of the Millerites—Miller, furthermore, in prophesying that the end of the world was at hand, was trying to be smarter than the Lord intended for anyone to be.⁷² A college commencement with its aristocratic society and elaborate dress, remarked the major, was "a live animal show."⁷³ Major Jones's common sense often transcended the prejudices of his class: cockiness and a glib tongue arouse his suspicions;⁷⁴ and the man who begins to rise above his friends discovers that they have become his enemies—until he reaches the top.⁷⁵ Female education, he predicted, would revolutionize the world.⁷⁶ Like the characteristic countryman that he is, he resents having a pet dog in the house,⁷⁷ and in orthodox male fashion he strongly believes that houses were made to live in and not to be kept clean.⁷⁸

Major Jones finally becomes a political mouthpiece for Thompson's rabid devotion to the Whig party. In his Fourth of July oration, he bemoans the fact that contemporary politicians are insignificant and corrupt.⁷⁹ His first born is named Henry Clay.⁸⁰ Whig principles are elaborately extolled, and the major praises

67. *Ibid.*, I, VII. 68. *Ibid.*, XXII.

69. *Ibid.*, XXII-XXIV. 70. *Ibid.*, VI.

71. *Ibid.*, VIII. 72. *Ibid.*, XVII.

73. *Ibid.*, XXII.

74. "When I see anybody tryin' right off to show how smart they is, and takin' all the conversation to themselves, I keep my eye on 'em. Cause when people is any account they's got sense enough to know that other people will soon find it out; but when they really aint nobody, and when they know they'd amount to less the more they's found out, then they try to make people believe they's the mischief and all, before they can have a chance to see into 'em. . . . Insurance [cockiness] is like varnish; it makes the commonest kind of yaller pine look zactly like mahogany, and insurance covers all the rotten places in the character of the worst kind of rascals and makes 'em appear like gentlemen." *Ibid.*, Letter XI.

75. "I've always noticed it to be the case, that whenever a man begins to rise a little in the world, everybody that knows him is shore to try to set him back; but if he's got real genus he's shore to succeed in spite of all his *old friends*, and then ther's nobody hurras for him louder than they does. It's the way with human nater—envy won't let 'em give a man popularity, but when he gits it in spite of 'em, and is independent of 'em, then they feel like the boot was on tother leg, and is monstrous glad to git any notice from him." *Ibid.*, Letter XIX.

76. *Ibid.*, IV.

77. *Ibid.*, XX.

78. *Ibid.*, XI.

79. *Ibid.*, XXI.

80. *Ibid.*, XXVI.

General Duncan L. Clinch, under whom he had "got his military perpensity."⁸¹ Major Jones attacks Tyler's floating money policy, prophecies war with Mexico, and sneers at the "loky-fokys [loco focos]," who try to hang onto Jackson's popularity.⁸² He makes a humorous but telling defense of the diminutive Alexander H. Stephens' activities in Congress and calls that legislator's enemies, superior only in physical size to the "Little Giant," mere "gobs of reorganized hog-meat and hominy."⁸³

Next in importance to Major Jones is Mary Stallings, who becomes his wife. Once a tomboy, she goes off to the Female College in Macon and returns home a belle.⁸⁴ Though much in love with the major, she teases him on occasion.⁸⁵ Like all the belles of the age, she blushes easily and often, her mother's mentioning stockings in the presence of the major causing her extreme embarrassment.⁸⁶ She is conventional enough almost to faint when Joseph is thrown from his horse;⁸⁷ but she is scheming enough to encourage Crotchett in an effort to speed up the major's love making.⁸⁸ She is intelligent enough to do well at the college examination.⁸⁹ Though she suspected that Joseph would use the bag in his proposal, she never let him know.⁹⁰ When Pete plays a trick on the major, she quickly retaliates by making Pete the butt of another prank.⁹¹ When he caused Joseph to be arrested by a ruse, she is hot tempered enough to threaten to scald the schemer's "fool face."⁹² She becomes an excellent wife but is at the same time normal and human in her whims and excessive worry over a new baby.⁹³ She has only a slight kinship to the languishing and insipid creature of the sentimental novels of the time; she is a much more real flesh-and-blood personality with sufficient vivacity, charm, and frailty to make her attractive and life-like.

Her mother, Mrs. Stallings, is a simple-minded country woman who is extremely inquisitive about her neighbors' soap-making, turkeys, and other matters of common rural household concern.⁹⁴

81. *Southern Miscellany*, December 8, 1843. This letter and others about politics were never published in book form. General Clinch, a Georgian, was an important Whig politician in 1843.

82. *Ibid.*, January 12, 1844.

83. *Ibid.*, January 26, 1844. It should be noted that when Major Jones comments on politics, he has an impudence and a sharp tongue not found elsewhere.

84. *Courtship*, Letter I. 85. *Ibid.* 86. *Ibid.*, I, XII.

87. *Ibid.*, III. 88. *Ibid.*, VIII-X.

89. *Ibid.*, IV. 90. *Ibid.*, XII. 91. *Ibid.*, XV.

92. *Ibid.*, XX.

93. *Ibid.*, XX, XXVI-XXVIII. 94. *Ibid.*, I.

She is puritanical enough to believe that girls should read their Bibles on Sunday, and mixes her politics and religion to the extent that she believes President Tyler is the curse sent upon the nation for Sabbath breaking and other sins.⁹⁵ Novels, of course, are lies from end to end.⁹⁶ Blunt-spoken, she has no patience with the finickiness of her daughters.⁹⁷ Practical, she refuses to buy a piano in hard times.⁹⁸ Her economy and superstition exhibit themselves when she advises the major to save the bundle of hair sent to him and to plant it with the Irish potatoes—since hog hair improves them, a dandy's should do likewise.⁹⁹ She resorts to old-fashioned remedies such as onion juice and catnip tea.¹⁰⁰ Frequently after falling asleep in her chair, the old lady partially awakes and talks without knowing what she is saying.¹⁰¹ Credulous, religious, and superstitious, she believes in dreams, accepts the Bible literally, becomes frightened by the earthquake, and has faith in Miller's famous prophecies for a time; but she has enough common sense to see through Crotchett.¹⁰² Like most simple people she does not inhibit the consoling power of weeping: she has a good cry at Mary's engagement and hysterics during the wedding.¹⁰³ Except for two incidents,¹⁰⁴ she is a convincing person, a Southern version of Widow Bedott and Mrs. Partington in some respects, and a character whom Thompson might well have developed further.¹⁰⁵

The other characters in the *Courtship* are of minor importance. Cousin Pete pretends to be a doctor but he has no practice.¹⁰⁶ He is jealous of Major Jones and plays tricks on him whenever possible.¹⁰⁷ The would-be physician is a country dandy and is

95. *Ibid.*, V, XXIV.

96. *Ibid.*, XXVI.

97. *Ibid.*, XII.

98. *Ibid.*, VIII.

99. *Ibid.*, XXIII.

100. *Ibid.*, XXVII.

101. *Ibid.*, VIII.

102. *Ibid.*, VIII-X, XII-XIV.

103. *Ibid.*, XII, XVI.

104. She becomes a ridiculous figure when she rigs up a cowbell to warn her when another earthquake is coming to end the world (Letter XVII) and when she faints at breakfast with a corn muffin in her mouth (Letter XXVIII).

105. Thompson actually used her later as a commentator on contemporary events. She was outraged because of an attempt by the Northern radicals to abolish the "cat" from the Navy, the simple old soul believing that cats consoled the sailors who were absent from their dear wives. *Savannah Morning News*, February 15, 1850. When ex-President Tyler announced the birth of a daughter, Mrs. Stallings thought that he was "perfectly audacious," to act so at his age over a "gall baby." The old lady then remarked, "If I was his wife I'd serve him like he did the United States Bank, I'd put my veto, as they call it, right down on any more such doings." *Ibid.*, March 7, 1850. She also commented on panoramas (*ibid.*, March 9, 1850), on somnambulism (*ibid.*, March 11, 1851), and on Turkish trousers (*ibid.*, May 17, 1851). There is at least the possibility that Thompson began this type of comment sometime between 1846 and 1848, when he ran a humorous column in the *Western Continent*, but only scattering issues of that literary newspaper are now extant. Whether he preceded B. P. Shillaber in this type of humorous comment or imitated him is not discoverable. Since the *Savannah Morning News* made no mention of Mrs. Stallings' observations being a new feature, Thompson presumably must have used her elsewhere in this capacity.

106. *Courtship*, Letter V.

107. *Ibid.*, XV, XIX.

regularly made the butt of a joke.¹⁰⁸ Crotchett, on the other hand, is an impertinent fake dandy from the North and is a caricature.¹⁰⁹ Keziah Stallings is the eternal tomboy: it is she who induces Pete to spend the night in a bag which belongs to one of her slaves;¹¹⁰ it is she who frightens the major and all the others in the family with her April Fool joke.¹¹¹ Negro slaves are simply taken for granted: they are pictured as faithful but inefficient servants who are always obedient to their masters.¹¹²

All of the characters in *Major Jones's Courtship* live ordinary lives in the rustic atmosphere of a normal middle Georgia rural community. Their everyday activities are enlivened by only such exciting and humorous events as might plausibly happen to such characters living in interior Georgia. At least in the literary tradition, the countryman expresses his humor almost altogether in the form of practical jokes. Thompson gave considerable emphasis to such horseplay, but it is noteworthy that, conceivably motivated by the fact that he was writing for a family newspaper, he used milder pranks than Longstreet before him or those then found in the *Spirit of the Times*.¹¹³ Serious physical discomfort, regularly found in the humor of the period, is absent. Major Jones gets merely a bruised nose and a ducking when he "skins the cat" in the top of a tree;¹¹⁴ he is hit over the head several times with a book in the parlor game of "Brother, I'm Bobbed";¹¹⁵ he is overpowered and falsely arrested "for contorting the lovely faces of the girls in Augusta" with his letters;¹¹⁶ and he is April Fooled when Keziah apparently drops his son over the upstairs banisters.¹¹⁷ Pete is tricked into sitting down in a tub of water in the parlor game of "Interduction to the King and Queen,"¹¹⁸ and becomes the present of a negro woman when he is deceived into believing that he is in Keziah's bag.¹¹⁹ These mishaps and pranks are gentle and mild when com-

108. *Ibid.*, VI, XV, XXV. 109. *Ibid.*, VIII, IX.

110. *Ibid.*, XXV. 111. *Ibid.*, XXVIII.

112. *Ibid.*, X, XXVII. For Thompson's propaganda in defense of slavery, see Miller, "Thompson," Chapter V, in which is discussed *Major Jones's Sketches of Travel*.

113. See, for instance, the gruesome details of Longstreet's "The Fight" or any Sut Lovingood story by George Washington Harris. Any issue of the *Spirit of the Times* for this period contains humor more rough and more brutal than that in Thompson's letters.

114. *Courtship*, Letter V. 115. *Ibid.*, XV. 116. *Ibid.*, XIX.

117. *Ibid.*, XXVIII. 118. *Ibid.*, XV.

119. *Ibid.*, XXV. Pranks which placed a white man in an embarrassing relation to a Negro were very popular. Thompson's "The Runaway Match" has an avaricious white man deceived into eloping with a Negro woman whom he mistook for an heiress. *Spirit of the Times*, XVIII, 52 (March 25, 1848).

pared to the dangerous and exciting antics of the ring-tailed roarsers.

Folklore beliefs, country medicinals, social customs, personal habits, and community life contribute to the humor of the letters. Hog hair will improve the yield of Irish potatoes;¹²⁰ soft soap will soothe burned hands;¹²¹ "sut" tea, catnip tea, and onion juice are sovereign remedies for sick babies;¹²² asafoetidia and burned hen feathers will revive a person who has fainted.¹²³ Tobacco chewing is made humorous when the major tries to practice the art and propose to Mary at the same moment.¹²⁴ An ordinary coon hunt is enlivened by an unfortunate encounter with a skunk, and an evening of candy pulling, including burned fingers, furthers the courtship of the major.¹²⁵ Militia musters were important social occasions in the life of any rural community. Oliver Hillhouse Prince had stressed in his satiric sketch the vast ignorance of the commander and the utter incompetence of the soldiers;¹²⁶ Thompson has some of the latter but emphasizes Major Jones's vainglory over his dashing uniform and his being thrown from his horse. Further variety and humor are added to that occasion by political speeches and the free-for-all which follows them.¹²⁷ The Fourth of July celebration was probably the greatest annual event in Southern rural community life. Thompson developed amusing incongruity by having Major Jones's ungrammatical language express itself in the spread-eagle oratory of the age: the effect is humorous, but the crackerbox wisdom prevents it from going into burlesque.¹²⁸ The major's contrast between unscrupulous politicians of the present and the great patriotic statesmen of the past is customary nostalgia. When Major Jones later became an outright proponent of Whig principles, his letters became more serious because of their partisan-

120. *Courtship*, Letter XXIII.

121. *Ibid.*, X.

122. *Ibid.*, XXVII. "Sut" [soot] tea is made by mixing hot water and soot from a fireplace or stove. Soot was also smeared on open cuts and wounds.

123. *Ibid.*, XXVIII.

124. *Ibid.*, I.

125. *Ibid.*, VI, X.

126. "The Militia Drill." See footnote 17.

127. *Courtship*, Letter III.

128. "Do you think, if one of them plain old broad-brimed, straight-collared, knee-buckled republicans was to come back, he could recognise his countrymen in the starched up, soap-locked, high-heeled, sickly-lookin dandys of the present day? No, no, feller citizens, they would be jest as apt to claim kin with the Hottentots or Malays . . . Ladies, I must say a few words to you before I'm done. Your country expects much from you. You exerts a most powerful influence in the world, and we looks to you for a futer generation (some of 'em put ther fans and handkerchers to ther faces) of men and wimmin fit to inherit this glorious government, and to bring it back to its original purity and beauty." *Ibid.*, XXI.

ship and less humorous because of their sharp tones—at least to modern readers.¹²⁹

Variety of subject matter and attitude is found in Thompson's account of rustic family life, but sensational excitement and melodrama are missing. There is no true suspense about the love affair: the reader knows from the outset that Mary is willing and that Major Jones will overcome his inarticulateness in some fashion or other. Crotchett is only a straw rival. Much humor, however, is found in the major's naive account of the progress of his courtship and in his unique proposal. The details of farm life, the sentimentalism of the girls when one member of the family reads aloud a sad story from a late periodical,¹³⁰ the irritating whims of Mary as a young wife,¹³¹ and the trouble as well as the joy of caring for a young baby¹³² are all related in a convincing manner.

Humorous incongruity and variety in subject matter are further achieved by the very old device of placing a character in an environment entirely different from his native village and having him comment upon the strange life about him. This the author accomplishes by sending Major Jones on several journeys.¹³³ The young rustic goes to Macon, where he is converted to the virtues of female education and concludes that diplomas are "certifikits of good behavior."¹³⁴ His fright knows no end when he hears two men talk about "animel magnetism [hypnotism]—a new sort of ism what has jest broke out in the North."¹³⁵ The inhabitants of the city have very good food "considerin they was town people."¹³⁶ The major's uneasiness reaches a climax when he sees a parade of the Fantasticals (young men

129. See, for instance, the letter in the *Southern Miscellany*, January 26, 1844.

130. "I soon splained to the old woman the difference tween Whig politics and old Nipper's Loky Fokyism, and after I red the story about the 'Orphan Twins' [*Southern Miscellany*, November 24, 1843] to the galls, and set 'em all a cryin two or three times, they was all better pleased with the Miscellany than ever" [*Southern Miscellany*, December 1, 1843].

131. "The fact is, Mr. Thompson, these wimmin's curious things, and it takes a long time to understand 'em. Mr. Weller was about right when he told his son Samivel that when he was married he'd know some things as he didn't know then; but he showed his want of sense when he said he didn't know whether it would be worth while to go to so much trouble to learn so little. A man aint more'n half a right sort of man until he's married, and if he ain't willin to swaller the few little bitter things for the thousand sweet things of a married life, he better jest commit dogacide at once, for sich a man aint much better nor a dog at best." *Courtship*, Letter XVIII.

132. *Ibid.*, XXVII.

133. Thompson extended this device later into another book—*Major Jones's Sketches of Travel* (Philadelphia, 1848). See Miller, "Thompson," Chapter 5, for a full discussion.

134. *Courtship*, Letter IV.

135. *Ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*

dressed up in elaborate costumes).¹³⁷ A trip to Madison brings out his fear of a train, and the service and the language of the Negro waiter at the hotel put the major "to the onplush" (non-plus).¹³⁸ In Athens he eats sparingly at the hotel for fear that there is not enough food to go around, but much to his surprise there are enough scraps left to feed everybody in Pineville.¹³⁹ The enormous bustles of the aristocratic women and the whiskers and the soaplocks of the dandies meet his sternest plebeian disapproval.¹⁴⁰ The obstreperousness of college boys is mentioned.¹⁴¹ The major hears the great orator at a college commencement and "sich a thunderin crowd and sich a everlastin gatherin of carriages and horses I never did see."¹⁴² These activities and observations of Major Jones are especially amusing because they successfully represent a countryman's point of view expressed in convincing rural dialect.

No detailed study of *Major Jones's Courtship* can ignore an examination of the author's language. Thompson himself stated that his purpose in the diction, grammar, and spelling which he employed was to make them consistent with the language and the pronunciation of middle Georgia farmers. Although these devices make much of the humor of the *Courtship*, he emphatically declared that he had used them for accuracy and not for cheap wit.¹⁴³ His aim, therefore, is to be distinguished from the practices of the literary comedians, who employed their ingenuity to extend these tricks into fantastic tours de force.¹⁴⁴ Thompson's cacography, it follows, was meant to represent the natural spelling of a half-educated Georgia "cracker" or to indicate his pronunciation. Illustrations are seen in the following list:

Tobacker, huckleberryin, jinin, tother, hath [hearth], widder, bime-by, ax'd [asked], thar, gwine, komed [combed], dore, kiver, lighterd

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*, VII. 139. *Ibid.*, XXII. 140. *Ibid.*

141. For evidence of student assault and battery of faculty members, see Chapter IV of Professor E. Merton Coulter's *College Life in the Old South* (New York, 1928). In this volume is an authentic history of the University of Georgia.

142. *Courtship*, Letter XXII.

143. "For this purpose the local dialect or *patois* peculiar to the rural district of Georgia was employed, with the orthography necessary to convey the peculiar pronunciation of the word. Consistency, and not an effort at cheap wit, compelled the resort not only to incorrect grammar, but also to a mode of spelling many words, more simple than is found in our standard lexicons." *Major Jones's Courtship*, 7.

144. Thompson sharply disapproved of promiscuous distortions of the language, even by a Southern writer: "Dr. G. W. Bagby continues his ridiculous 'Hist'ry uv the Waw.' Right here, we want to protest against this sort of thing. The mangling and murdering of etymology is no part of humor" *Savannah Morning News*, March 9, 1871.

[lightwood], pervent [prevent], hart [heart], sitewation, mought,¹⁴⁵ betallion, siled [soiled], fethers, pidgin [pigeon], fust, rale [real], minit, major, drunkerds, cum [come], hoss, skeered [scared], yeath [earth], nigger, yaller [yellow], pore [poor],¹⁴⁶ edecation, planner, sole [soul], innercent, perticeler, creeter, weepion, cowcumber [cucumber],¹⁴⁷ catasterfy, leetle, histed, rite,¹⁴⁸ kin [can], ingins [Indians], blegged [obliged], picter, kramberry, apern [apron],¹⁴⁹ perminadin [prominading], Jarsey [Jersey], hydrophoby [hydrophobia],¹⁵⁰ simp-tem, decate [etiquette? educate?],¹⁵¹ sartin [certain]¹⁵² jice [joist],¹⁵³ highstericks [hysterics]¹⁵⁴ summonsed, genewine,¹⁵⁵ Mountgomery [Montgomery], liebill [libel],¹⁵⁶ pisen [poison],¹⁵⁷ persession [procession], busum, ansister [ancestor],¹⁵⁸ yarb [herb],¹⁵⁹ piert [peart, pert],¹⁶⁰ nussin [nursing], tarrified [terrified].¹⁶¹

The major's errors in grammar are those which are still common among uneducated people: violations of agreement between subject and verb,¹⁶² misuse of case,¹⁶³ faulty conjunctions,¹⁶⁴ double negatives,¹⁶⁵ and innumerable incorrect tense forms.¹⁶⁶ But more striking and humorous than those errors are the Southern word coinage and the peculiar rustic phrasing which are characteristic of Major Jones's diction. When Mary bowed, the major described her action by saying that she "made a sort of a stoop over and a dodge back."¹⁶⁷ He later "crawfished" out of the girls' room.¹⁶⁸ Military tactics are called "military tick-tacks."¹⁶⁹ Pete's failure to mention a matter is expressed as "he never said peas about" it.¹⁷⁰ Social climbers who imitate the aristocrats are designated as "highfliers."¹⁷¹ To "mistrust" is to "surmise."¹⁷² Good-for-nothing people are called "no great scratches."¹⁷³ When time passes slowly the major concludes that "the axeltree of the world wanted greasin."¹⁷⁴ A newspaper puff is "a downright crow."¹⁷⁵ To be in a state of nervous excitement is to "be in a terrible swivet."¹⁷⁶ The command "go to grass" is a polite euphemism.¹⁷⁷ A baby that is having spasms is "spasomy."¹⁷⁸ Medicine is "doctor stuff."¹⁷⁹ Peculiarly Geor-

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| 145. <i>Courtship</i> , Letter I. | 146. <i>Ibid.</i> , III. | 147. <i>Ibid.</i> , IV. |
| 148. <i>Ibid.</i> , V. | 149. <i>Ibid.</i> , VII. | 150. <i>Ibid.</i> , IX. |
| 151. <i>Ibid.</i> , X. | 152. <i>Ibid.</i> , XI. | 153. <i>Ibid.</i> , XII. |
| 154. <i>Ibid.</i> , XIII. | 155. <i>Ibid.</i> , XV. | |
| 156. <i>Ibid.</i> , XVIII. | | |
| 157. <i>Ibid.</i> , XIX. | 158. <i>Ibid.</i> , XXI. | 159. <i>Ibid.</i> , XXIV. |
| 160. <i>Ibid.</i> , XXVI. | 161. <i>Ibid.</i> , XXVII. | |
| 162. "The Stallinses lives; you does." <i>Ibid.</i> , I. | | |
| 163. "Them side-looks." <i>Ibid.</i> , V. | | |
| 164. "So" for <i>so that</i> (<i>ibid.</i> , III); "like" for <i>as if</i> (<i>ibid.</i> , VI); "being as" for <i>because</i> (<i>ibid.</i> , XXVIII). | | |
| 165. "It don't hurt 'em none." <i>Ibid.</i> , IV. | | |
| 166. "Sot, begun, seed, drap," (<i>ibid.</i> , I); "brung" (<i>ibid.</i> , III); "hearn" (<i>ibid.</i> , IV); "aint" (<i>ibid.</i> , XIV). | | |
| 167. <i>Ibid.</i> , I. | 168. <i>Ibid.</i> , ... | 169. <i>Ibid.</i> , III. |
| 170. <i>Ibid.</i> , VI. | 171. <i>Ibid.</i> , IX. | 172. <i>Ibid.</i> , XIX. |
| 173. <i>Ibid.</i> , ... | 174. <i>Ibid.</i> , X. | 175. <i>Ibid.</i> , XIX. |
| 176. <i>Ibid.</i> , XXI. | 177. <i>Ibid.</i> , XXV. | 178. <i>Ibid.</i> , XXVII. |
| 179. <i>Ibid.</i> , ... | | |

gian is the calling of a pseudonymous letter a "bucket letter."¹⁸⁰ Another class of words used by Major Jones are terms which a rustic employs in an effort to obtain a high-sounding effect:¹⁸¹ "ruminate,"¹⁸² "monstrous,"¹⁸³ "flustrated,"¹⁸⁴ "fractious,"¹⁸⁵ "stancheous,"¹⁸⁶ "nincomnoddle,"¹⁸⁷ "oudacious,"¹⁸⁸ "conflutements,"¹⁸⁹ "notionate,"¹⁹⁰ "gabblement,"¹⁹¹ "onplus" [non-plus],¹⁹² "shecoonery" [chicanery],¹⁹³ "hurryment,"¹⁹⁴ "wholesome" [for *health*],¹⁹⁵ "unbeknowin,"¹⁹⁶ "uncontionable [unconsciously? without count?],¹⁹⁷ and "jubous" [dubious].¹⁹⁸

Thompson's most effective device, however, for humorous diction is the appropriateness to a rustic character of the earthy metaphors and similes employed by Major Jones. He complimented Mary's hair and face as being "as slick and shiny as a mahogany burow."¹⁹⁹ She blushed "as beautiful as a morning-glory."²⁰⁰ When she went to the blackboard at the public examination in college, her "chalk rattled on the board like a flock of chickens pickin corn off a clap-board."²⁰¹ While with her on one occasion, the major continued talking "like a cotton gin in packin time."²⁰² He blushed "blue as a Ginny squash," but he thought that he could knock "Matthew Matix into a grease spot."²⁰³ He once felt "like a feller jest out of a hornet's nest."²⁰⁴ After a journey he arrived at home as "safe as a crate of warranted cups and sassers."²⁰⁵ He shaved his face "as slick as a smoothin iron."²⁰⁶ When he was embarrassed his face "felt red as a pepper-pod" and his ears "burnt like they was frostbit."²⁰⁷ The red feather in his hat waved "as graceful as a corn tossel in a whirlwind."²⁰⁸ At the arrival of the political candidates, the

180. *Ibid.*, XXIII. The source of this Americanism has just been discovered. David I. Holt of Clinton, Jones County, Georgia, was a strong supporter of Troup in 1825. Holt, at that time a member of Congress, wrote many letters to John Quincy Adams, then President of the United States, and signed them Edward Bucket. Adams was so impressed with the shrewd political judgment expressed in the letters that he inquired for the name of the author. When the story became generally known, Georgians began to call a pseudonymous letter a "bucket letter." *Macon Telegraph*, April 5, 1859, quoted in *Savannah Morning News*, April 7, 1859.

181. A somewhat similar situation occurs today when an illiterate Negro household servant attempts to use the language of the educated people whom he serves. The sermons of semi-illiterate Negro preachers today in the rural districts of the South are replete with such attempts at high-sounding language.

182. *Courtship*, Letter I. 183. *Ibid.* 184. *Ibid.*

185. *Ibid.*, II. 186. *Ibid.*, IV.

187. 1844 edition, Letter XXV. 188. *Courtship*, Letter, VI.

189. *Ibid.*, VII. 190. *Ibid.*, XVIII.

191. *Ibid.*, XXVII. 192. *Ibid.*, VII.

193. *Ibid.*, III. 194. *Ibid.*, VI.

195. *Ibid.*, III. 196. *Ibid.*, I. 197. *Ibid.*

198. *Ibid.*, XXI. 199. *Ibid.*, I.

200. *Ibid.*, XII. 201. *Ibid.*, IV. 202. *Ibid.*, I.

203. *Ibid.* 204. *Ibid.* 205. *Ibid.*, VII.

206. *Ibid.*, XII. 207. *Ibid.*, X. 208. *Ibid.*, III.

soldiers crowded around "as thick as flies around a fat gourd."²⁰⁹ Major Jones's notion of a steam engine letting off steam was that "the infernal critter sot up a yell like a panther with a grindstone on his tail."²¹⁰ Some of the persons asleep on the train were "tossin and twistin about as busy as bull yearlins in fly time," but others were "quiet as a midlin of meat."²¹¹ Moving from the country plantation to town caused the major to become "as busy as yaller jackets in a cotton blossom."²¹² When unable to speak in the presence of Mary, he said that his throat felt as if he had "swallered a bundle of fodder."²¹³ Crotchett grinned "like a baked possum."²¹⁴ The crowd facing the major as he began his Fourth of July oration was "as still as mice."²¹⁵ A cur was not "worth shucks to trail."²¹⁶ Long whiskers and "soaplocks" made a dandy's face resemble "a weasel lookin out of a moss mattress."²¹⁷ The metaphorical language which Major Jones used is convincingly appropriate to his rustic character and everyday background; it clearly has no kinship to the exaggerated language found in the tall tales.

A few other humorous devices should be mentioned: malapropisms,²¹⁸ a play on words,²¹⁹ anti-climax in sentences,²²⁰ and incongruous parallelism within sentences.²²¹ Perhaps more humor is found, however, in the major's misunderstanding of unfamiliar words and in his allusions to Scripture and the classics. He mistook "Matthew Matix" for a rival²²² and talked about "Tom Kimides" and his famous lever.²²³ A mounted young blade elaborately disguised so that every bone in his body seemed to show

209. *Ibid.* 210. *Ibid.*, VII. 211. *Ibid.*

212. *Ibid.*, VIII. 213. *Ibid.*, X. 214. *Ibid.*, VIII.

215. *Ibid.*, XXI. 216. *Ibid.*, VI. 217. *Ibid.*, XXIV.

218. Major Jones made a "transgression" instead of a "digression" (Letter XII) and wanted to "persecute" the railroad when he thought that it had discharged him at a wrong station (Letter VII).

219. When asked at the college commencement in Athens if he were going to take a degree, the major replied in the negative and said that he "tuck the *Miscellany*" (Letter XXII).

220. "We's all pretty well, 'cept the old woman [his mother-in-law], who's been in a monstous flustration about the comet, and the yearth quakes, and the harrycanes, and snowstorms, and sich things, for more'n a month, and I've had a most bominable sore throat, which I got lookin at the comet jest to please her; but Mary soon cured that with some sage tea and turpentine" (Letter XVII).

221. ". . . I quit chawin tobacker and tuck to writin literature" (Letter II). ". . . I was whirlin, and pitchin, and swingin about in the smoke and fire till I cum full length right smack on the ground, 'in all the pride, pomp, and circumstances of glorious war,' as Mr. Shakespear ses" (Letter III). "I couldn't speak—I was makin up my mind for tellin her the sitewation of my hart—I was jest gwine to tell her my feelings, but my mouth was chock full of tobacker, so I had to spit . . ." (Letter I).

222. *Courtship*, Letter I.

223. *Ibid.*, IV.

resembled "death in the primer" to Major Jones.²²⁴ When the way is cleared for his wedding, the major apologetically quotes Shakespeare.²²⁵ His naive but slightly sacrilegious remarks about hogs should have amused his common sense readers: "I go for hog meat myself, any way it can be fixed, notwithstanding old nick was turned into 'em once, and set a whole gang of 'em run-in down a step hill into the sea, whar they got drowned in the water. Old Miss Stallins ses it's all a fact, and I don't never care about gitin into a argyment with her; but thar's one thing I'm certain of—if the old feller did git into the hogs then, he didn't spile the meat."²²⁶

The newspaper publication of the Major Jones letters demands detailed comment. After the first letter appeared in the *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*,²²⁷ Thompson enlarged the letter and printed the new form in the *Southern Miscellany*.²²⁸ Between August 20, 1842 and February 9, 1844, Thompson wrote the first twenty-six letters of *Major Jones's Courtship* and four additional ones never included in book form.²²⁹ The letters in the *Southern Miscellany* differ from the book in several details: the name is Stallions instead of Stallins;²³⁰ there are puffs for the *Miscellany* and for a bookseller in Augusta;²³¹ the major slurs the Griffins, Thompson's personal enemies;²³² the game of "Interduction to the King and Queen" is missing;²³³ Major Jones complains that the South does not appreciate its own authors;²³⁴ he sharply reproves William T. Porter for his delight in chucker-luck and horse-racing;²³⁵ the major tells a stale joke about Abraham and the "sassengers";²³⁶ and four Whig political letters are included.²³⁷

Hanleiter, the publisher of the *Miscellany*, found such a de-

224. *Ibid.* 225. *Ibid.*, XIV. 226. *Ibid.*, IX.

227. *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror*, II, 191-2 (June, 1842).

228. *Southern Miscellany*, August 20, 1842. The enlargement chiefly consists of the major's entering the girls' room by accident while groping in the dark.

229. Major Jones letters are found in the *Southern Miscellany* issues for August 20, 27, September 3, 10, October 1, 8, 29, November 12, 26, December 10, 24, 1842; January 7, 14, 28, February 11, 25, April 1, May 27, June 10, 24, July 15, August 12, 26, September 16, December 1, 8, 22, 1843; January 12, 26, February 9, 1844.

230. The loser in Longstreet's "The Fight" was named Billy Stallions (Stallings). Thompson may have taken the name from that story, but even today the writer of this article has heard rural Georgians say *Stallions* for *Stallings*.

231. *Southern Miscellany*, August 27, 1842; June 10, 1843.

232. *Ibid.*, August 27, 1842.

233. This episode is first found in the 1843 Madison edition of the *Courtship*.

234. *Southern Miscellany*, June 10, 1843; January 12, 1844.

235. *Ibid.*, January 12, 1844.

236. *Ibid.*, August 26, 1843.

237. *Ibid.*, December 1, 8, 22, 1843; January 26, 1844.

mand for back numbers of the paper by people who wanted the Major Jones letters that he issued a limited pamphlet edition which contained the first sixteen letters.²³⁸ This booklet was offered free to any subscriber who paid a year's advance subscription to the *Miscellany*, a policy which clearly suggests that both Hanleiter and Thompson considered the letters as having only local commercial value.²³⁹ Thompson's private letter to a friend gives an interesting account of the next edition:

I never deemed the letters which I had hurriedly written to fill a corner once a week in a village newspaper, worthy of book form, and they would probably never have assumed that form but for a wealthy citizen of Madison, a Col. Jones, who insisted that they should be printed in a book at his own expense. While making enquiries for him as to the cost of publication etc. I received a proposition from Messrs. Carey and Hart of Philadelphia proposing to publish the book and asking what I would take per copy for each copy they would manufacture and sell. Had they asked me for the Mss., I would have freely given it then, so little confidence had I in the success of the book. I returned for answer that five cents per copy would satisfy me, fearful that any higher price would bluff them off. They promptly accepted my terms and "Maj. Jones Courtship" [*sic*] became the first book of Carey and Harts [*sic*] Humorous Library." During the first year of its publication I received, at five cts. per copy, \$750 and thinking it had had its run, I the same year accepted \$250 for the copyright entire, making the sum of \$1000 received for what I would have freely given to any publisher. I have the best assurances that if I had retained the copyright it would have yielded at least \$2500 at 5 cts. per copy yearly to the present time [1866].²⁴⁰

By May, 1844, Carey and Hart had published the *Courtship*.²⁴¹ Although this was the first Philadelphia edition, it was offered as a second and greatly enlarged edition.²⁴² It was dedicated to

238. *Major Jones'* [*sic*] *Courtship* (Madison, 1843). This edition contains only the first sixteen letters. One thousand copies were printed in this edition, according to Thompson's introduction to the Philadelphia edition. *Major Jones's Courtship* (Philadelphia, 1844), 7. The only extant copy of the Madison edition is now in the Duke University library.

239. *Southern Miscellany*, February 25, 1843.

240. Letter to Salem Dutcher, October 16, 1866.

241. Nelle Smither has pointed out the widespread acceptance of a bibliographical ghost—a Philadelphia 1840 edition. She traces it to *Appletons' Encyclopaedia*, 1887. Miss Smither points out further that it can be found in William P. Trent, *Southern Writers*; in Samuel A. Link, *Pioneers of Southern Literature*, Vol. II; and in Fred Lewis Pattee, *The First Century of American Literature*. "Library of Humorous American Works: A Bibliographical Study," unpublished Master's Thesis (Columbia University, 1936), 6. This same bibliographical ghost can also be found in Wade, *Longstreet*, 382, and in Jennette Tandy, *Crackerbox Philosophers in American Humor and Satire* (New York, 1925), 92.

242. Thompson received his first personal copy of this edition shortly before May 13, 1844, and was highly pleased with the format. See Thompson's personal letter to Carey and Hart, May 13, 1844, now in the hands of Mr. Franklin J. Meine of Chicago, Illinois. The copyright of this edition of the *Courtship* was deposited by Carey and Hart in the Library of Congress on May 14, 1844. The title page of this copy has "Second Edition, Greatly Enlarged."

General Duncan L. Clinch²⁴³ and contained twenty-six letters with twelve illustrations by F. O. C. Darley.²⁴⁴ Thompson revised his original introduction²⁴⁵ and added in one letter his strongest diatribe against dandies.²⁴⁶ Carey and Hart sold 15,000 copies within a year.²⁴⁷ A sixth edition was announced in November, 1845,²⁴⁸ and a seventh in August, 1846.²⁴⁹ Two letters were added when the eighth edition became the sixth volume of Carey and Hart's "Library of Humorous American Works" in 1847.²⁵⁰

243. General Clinch was Thompson's admired commander during the Seminole War of 1836. He, furthermore, was a leading Whig in Georgia when Thompson was writing the *Courtship* letters.

244. *Major Jones's Courtship: Detailed with other Scenes, Incidents, and Adventures, In a Series of Letters, by Himself.* Second Edition, Greatly Enlarged. With Illustrations by Darley (Philadelphia, 1844). Thompson had unqualified praise for F. O. C. Darley's illustrations. Letter to Carey and Hart, May 13, 1844.

245. Thompson's emphasis is on the amusing qualities of the book and a hope that it will earn the author some money: "I know ther aint so much botherment of the brains involved, neither in the writin nor the readin of my book, as ther is in 'Letters from under a Bridge,' but if it will serve to draw a few nails out of your coffin, by makin you laugh, they will serve a equally benevolent purpose by puttin a few dollars in the pocket of . . . Joseph Jones." *Courtship* (1844 edition), 8.

246. "I sed ther wasn't nothing new down here—well ther haint been much—but ther was one of the curiousest live things here tother day from Augusta that ever was seen in these parts. It was sort o' tween a dandy and a gote, but on a slight examination it would have passed very well for a old monkey with its tail cut off or tucked under its cote. The most distinguished feature about it was a little impertinent lookin gote-knot that stuck rite strate out from its chin, jest like them little gotes what they have in the mountains with tails drawed up so tight that ther hind feet don't hardly touch the ground. It had a cap on its head and a outlandish lookin bag cote. It went round town without anybody with it, and I never was so glad Mary [pregnant at the time] was to home at the plantation. At first my pinter dog tried his best to set it, but soon as it turned round so he could see its face he just snuffled a little and drapped his tail and walked off. The fact was, he couldn't make out what sort of a varmint it was. Bimeby it spoke to somebody, and then Spike know'd it was some kind of a human, but he kep his eye on him all the time. I never did b'lieve in Metemichosisism as they call it, before lately, but now I can't help but b'lieve ther's somthing in it. Whether people really do turn into animals or not after they're dead, I won't pretend to say; but one thing I'm certain of, and that is, that some people git to be monstrous nigh monkeys and gotes before they do die. All that little feller what was down here tother day wanted to make a complete billy gote out of him, was to have his cote-tail cut to a pint and turned up behind. If they can help it, I don't see what our young dandies make sich gotes of themselves for. If it's to be conspicuous, they don't gain nothing by it—for people is sure to ask questions about 'em, and then they're sure to find out, that they aint much—generally some nincomnodde, that's sprung from nothing and don't know how to live in decent people's circumstances." *Ibid.*, Letter XXV. Thompson later omitted this passage of crude humor which palpably sought to delight ignorant backwoods readers.

247. Thompson's letter to Salem Dutcher, October 16, 1866.

248. Advertisement in *Spirit of the Times*, XV, 464 (November 22, 1845).

249. Baltimore *Western Continent*, August 22, 1846.

250. Smither, *op. cit.*, p. 28. The two new letters concern the baby's lives and the April Fool joke. Thompson sent the latter originally to Porter, who published it in *Spirit of the Times*, XIV, 73 (April 13, 1844). This letter (in both the *Spirit* and the new edition) contains an attack on John Smith of Philadelphia, a contributor to the *Spirit*, who, after reading some misdated Major Jones letters, did some finger-counting and accused the major of having spent a night in the Stallings home prior to getting into the bag, *Spirit of the Times*, XIV, 25 (March 16, 1844). Major Jones answered him fully: "I seed in the *Spirit of the Times*, 'tother day, whar some one of the everlastin eternal John Smiths has been castin some insinuations on my wife's character. I red it to Mary, and she's been poutin 'bout it ever sense. She sees he's a nasty, mean wretch, to be pesterin himself 'bout what don't consarn him, and castin slurs

The ninth was issued in 1848,²⁵¹ the twelfth in 1852,²⁵² the sixteenth in 1854²⁵³ and the seventeenth in 1855.²⁵⁴ T. B. Peterson and Company kept the book in print until the copyright was returned by law to Thompson in 1872.²⁵⁵ That firm made it the first volume of its "Library of Humorous American Works" and published new editions in 1856,²⁵⁶ in 1857,²⁵⁷ and in 1865.²⁵⁸ Two pirated editions were printed in England,²⁵⁹ and new American editions were published in 1872,²⁶⁰ 1879,²⁶¹ 1884²⁶² and two in 1893,²⁶³ and at least once since 1900.²⁶⁴ Thompson stated that 80,000 copies of the *Courtship* had been sold by 1852.²⁶⁵ It is idle to speculate on the number sold since that date.

Thanks to the system of newspaper exchanges, furthermore,

on decent people; and if she only knowed who he was she'd scald his 'bominable ugly eyes out of him. I told her it wasn't no use to try to do that, for the Mississippi wouldn't begin to drown all the mean scamps that go by that name. I'm gwine to write Mr. Porter to tell his Pittsburg correspondent that we're decent Christian white people out here in Georgia, and he mustn't wonder if we is a little smarter than his people, what live way up thar in the fork, whar they swaller more coal smoke in a year than would bust a balloon, and whar they're so black and dirty that it would take six months' bleachin to make 'em pass for white folks. If my crap turns out any thing, and cotton don't go clean down to nothing, I think its more'n likely I will take a journey to the big north next summer; and if I do, Mr. John Smith better keep clear of my track." *Major Jones's Courtship* (Philadelphia, 1847), Letter XXVIII. Thompson later omitted this passage.

251. *Ibid.*, 1848. Mr. Franklin J. Meine of Chicago, Illinois, has a copy of this edition.

252. *Ibid.* (Philadelphia, 1852), cited by Smither, "Library of Humorous American Works . . .", 52.

253. Cited by Smither, "Library of Humorous American Works . . .", 36.

254. *Major Jones's Courtship* (Philadelphia, 1855). A copy of this edition is in the De Renne Library at the University of Georgia.

255. This publishing house did not usually date its editions; but newspapers sometimes supply the information about new issues. The *Courtship* seems to have been the most popular book in the Peterson "Library of Humorous American Works."

256. *Ibid.*, cited by Smither, Library of Humorous American Works . . ., 57.

257. The Peterson *Major Jones's Courtship* and *Major Jones's Travels* in one volume is announced in *Savannah Morning News*, January 7, 1857.

258. Peterson announced a new edition of the *Courtship* in the *Savannah Morning News*, September 20, 1865.

259. One edition is mentioned by Thompson in a letter to his wife on June 17, 1867, when he was in London. This letter is now in the possession of Mrs. Lewis E. McIntosh of Quitman, Georgia. The British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books lists the peculiar title *Yankee Comic Tales* by Major Jones (Glasgow and London, [1876]). This presumably is Thompson's *Courtship*.

260. *Major Jones's Courtship* . . . (New York, 1872). This is the revised author's edition and contains illustrations by Cary.

261. *Ibid.* (Philadelphia, copyrighted 1879).

262. *Ibid.* (Boston, 1884). This edition is mentioned by M. Clifford Harrison, *Social Types in Southern Fiction* (Ann Arbor, [1931]), 152.

263. *Ibid.* ("Atlantic Series"; New York, 1893). *Ibid.* (New York, 1893).

264. A newspaper clipping in the Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook (now in the possession of Mrs. Lewis E. McIntosh of Quitman, Georgia) states that a new edition of the *Courtship* was being printed fifty-eight years after the original publication. This may be an undated edition issued by the J. S. Ogilvie Company of New York. This publishing house had a dated edition in 1893.

265. *Savannah Morning News*, February 3, 1852.

the Major Jones letters reached countless other readers.²⁶⁶ Porter published at least five letters in the very popular *Spirit of the Times*.²⁶⁷ Some of the letters have been made available to still other readers by anthologies published in 1852,²⁶⁸ 1858,²⁶⁹ 1866,²⁷⁰ 1883²⁷¹ 1892²⁷² 1905²⁷³ 1907²⁷⁴ 1917,²⁷⁵ 1929,²⁷⁶ 1930²⁷⁷ and 1937.²⁷⁸

Major Jones became popular everywhere and among all classes. Two small country boys who rode horseback to Madison every Saturday to obtain the family copy of the *Miscellany* revelled in the letters all the way home.²⁷⁹ Ladies of the most fastidious taste, unable to tolerate the rough humor in most humorous books of the period, praised the *Courtship* unqualifiedly.²⁸⁰ Early in 1844 William T. Porter, ready to walk five miles to shake Thompson's hand, declared that the letters were already next in popu-

266. Letter XXII is found in the Athens, Georgia, *Southern Banner*, August 24, 1843. Thompson made a vigorous protest when the Columbia, Pennsylvania, *Protector* adapted the militia drill letter (Letter III) for home consumption and called it "Millersburg Training" (*Southern Miscellany*, May 20, 1843). T. B. Thorpe published Letter XXVI with some changes in the Concordia, Louisiana *Intelligencer*. (Cited by Porter in *Spirit of the Times*, XIV, 54 (March 30, 1844). Three years after Thompson had first published Letter XVII, and after the *Courtship* had been published in book form in both Madison and Philadelphia, this letter is found on the first page of the *Macon Banner* of Macon, Clarke County, Alabama — on May 29, 1845. For this citation I am indebted to Mr. Franklin J. Meine of Chicago. It seems probable that village and small town newspapers were especially fond of reprinting the *Courtship* letters. The examination of many files would be an endless task, even if full files were extant. The citations above appear to be representative and suggest an extremely wide popularity through local newspapers.

267. Letter XII is found in *Spirit of the Times*, XIII, 481 (December 9, 1843); Letter XVI, *ibid.*, 506 (December 23, 1843); Letter XXV., *ibid.*, 589-90 (February 10, 1844); Letter XXVI, *ibid.*, 612 (February 17, 1844); Letter XXVIII, *ibid.*, XIV, 73 (April 13, 1844).

268. [T. C. Haliburton], *Traits of American Humor* (London, 1852). Volume III contains eleven of the *Courtship* letters, pp. 234-313.

269. S. P. Avery, *The Harp of a Thousand Strings* (New York, [1858]), 36-40 has Letter I.

270. *Beadle's Dime Book of Fun*, Number 3 (New York, [1866]), 46-7 has Letter XII.

271. Henry Watterson, *Oddities in Southern Life and Character* (Boston, 1883), 135-79 contains Letters I, V-VI, VIII-XII, XVI.

272. Edmund Clarence Stedman and Ellen Mackay Hutchinson, *A Library of American Literature* (New York, 1892), VII, 174-7, has Letter XII.

273. William P. Trent, *Southern Writers: Selections in Prose and Verse* (New York, 1905), 253-8 has Letter XII.

274. *Library of Southern Literature* (Atlanta, 1907), XII, 5287-98 has Letters VII, XII.

275. Maurice Garland Fulton, *Southern Life in Southern Literature* (Boston, 1917), 170-7 has Letter XII.

276. Napier Wilt, *Some American Humorists* (New York, 1929), 57-92 contains Letters I, III, VIII, XII, XV, XVI.

277. Franklin J. Meine, *Tall Tales of the Southwest* ("Americana Deserta"; New York, 1930), 149-53 has Letter XII.

278. Blair, *Native American Humor*, 326-30 has Letter XII.

279. Editor of the Brunswick, Georgia, *Advertiser*, quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, August 29, 1880. See also a newspaper clipping by Dr. R. J. Massey in the Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook.

280. *Southern Miscellany*, December 28, 1843.

larity to those of Jack Downing.²⁸¹ A contributor to the *Spirit* who signed himself "Acorn" praised the *Courtship* letters;²⁸² "John Smith"²⁸³ and "Pardon Jones"²⁸⁴ teased the Georgia major. Park Benjamin wrote that readers in every part of the country were acquainted with *Major Jones's Courtship*.²⁸⁵ James W. Davidson over-enthusiastically declared that everybody in America had read the book.²⁸⁶ A well-known Georgia journalist made Thompson the center of a lecture on humor,²⁸⁷ and Colonel Henry Watterson later did the same.²⁸⁸ A newspaper associate of Thompson found that the humorist was "Major Jonsed" everywhere he travelled.²⁸⁹ The Philadelphia *American* stated in 1883 that the *Courtship* was still widely read.²⁹⁰ John H. Hewitt called it "an everlastingly popular book."²⁹¹ In 1887 an old man who had enjoyed the book thirty years before bought another copy, read it with nostalgic pleasure, and urged Thompson to write about Major Jones Reconstructed.²⁹² Flashy H. Clay Lukens called the *Courtship* "a moment of merriment at home and beyond the seas."²⁹³ Joel Chandler Harris wrote in 1882 that there was scarcely a rural household in the country where the *Courtship* could not be found. He went so far as to state that it was the one American book which rivalled the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.²⁹⁴ Judged in terms of general popularity, the *Courtship* should rightly be considered one of the most suc-

281. *Spirit of the Times*, XIII, 589 (February 10, 1844). Porter almost certainly read more American humor than any other man of his generation.

282. *Ibid.*, XV, 1 (March 1, 1845).

283. *Ibid.*, XIV, 25 (March 16, 1844).

284. *Ibid.*, XIV, 86-7 (April 20, 1844).

285. Baltimore *Western Continent*, January 3, 1846.

286. James W. Davidson, *The Living Writers of the South* (New York, 1869, 574).

287. Salem Dutcher, editor of the Augusta, Georgia, *Constitutionalist*, made Thompson the center of his lecture on "Wits of Georgia." He gave this lecture in Augusta, Savannah, and elsewhere in Georgia. Savannah *Morning News*, January 15, 1867.

288. Colonel Henry Watterson's lecture on Southern life included the reading of some of the *Courtship*. Savannah *Morning News*, January 23, 1879.

289. "M," apparently S. W. Mason, owner of the Savannah *Morning News*, took a trip into Florida in 1868 and discovered that everyone he met knew Major Jones and enthusiastically admired him. Savannah *Morning News*, April 8, 1868.

290. Newspaper clipping in the Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook. The clipping reviews as newly published Thompson's *John's Alive*, which was issued in 1883.

291. John H. Hewitt, *Shadows on the Wall, or Glimpes of the Past* (Baltimore, 1877), 30.

292. Personal letter to Thompson, dated January 27, 1877, and signed "Forsyth." Now in the possession of Mrs. Lewis E. McIntosh of Quitman, Georgia.

293. Personal letter by Lukens to Thompson, dated August 12, 1878. Now in the possession of Mrs. Lewis E. McIntosh of Quitman, Georgia.

294. Newspaper clipping in the Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook. Harris reviews as recently issued *John's Alive*, which was published in 1883. The clipping is clearly from the Atlanta *Constitution*, but is undated.

cessful books of humor published in America in the nineteenth century.

Interpretation and appreciation of *Major Jones's Courtship* from original publication to the present have properly emphasized its amusing qualities—its humor of topical events, its humor of provincial situation, its humor of character, its humor of diction, and its humor of crackerbox philosophizing. One Georgia editor announced that Thompson was a public benefactor for provoking hearty laughter in a dull, money-loving age.²⁹⁵ William T. Porter considered the humor in the *Courtship* letters superior to anything he had read since Thackeray's *Yellowplush Correspondence*.²⁹⁶ Another editor called Major Jones a "character *sui generis*," original, humorous, and jovial, and ranked the *Courtship* as "the drollest of droll books."²⁹⁷ Still another praised its healthy and hearty fun.²⁹⁸ Those critics who compared it to genteel humor written in a literary style found the humor in the *Courtship* somewhat coarse and vulgar;²⁹⁹ but others rightly observed that it was less gross and rude than *Simon Suggs*, *Sut Lovingood*, and other typical humor of the Old South and Southwest.³⁰⁰ One enthusiastic writer prophesied that Thompson would be read for a thousand years because "it was he and he alone who has put to record more enduring than marble the subtle humor of the 'Georgia Cracker'."³⁰¹ Another commentator accepted Mark Twain as the master of downright drollery, screaming parody, and broad burlesque, but ranked Thompson his superior in the truly fine serio-comic delicacy of humor.³⁰² William Hamilton Hayne, a Southern critic of considerable importance, believed that Thompson should be placed among the first American humorists.³⁰³

Many critics, however, have seen far more in *Major Jones's Courtship* than merely a popular illustration of American humor of the mid-nineteenth century. The book has been increasingly

295. Editor of the *Georgia Courier* (Augusta), quoted in the *Southern Miscellany*, May 20, 1843.

296. *Spirit of the Times*, XIV, 121 (May 11, 1844).

297. Editor of the *New Orleans Crescent*, quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, May 15, 1857.

298. *Philadelphia Age*, quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, November 26, 1872.

299. For instance, Davidson, *Living Writers of the South*, 574, and Barry Gray in the *Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook*.

300. Tandy, *Crackerbox Philosophers*, 89, and Watterson, *Oddities in Southern Life*, 134.

301. Gainesville, Georgia, *Eagle*, quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, April 3, 1882.

302. *Atlanta Journal*, September 20, 1899.

303. *The American*, V, 24 (October 21, 1882).

appreciated for its realism in character, incident, and dialect, for its value as local color and social history, and for the truthfulness of its crackerbox philosophizing.³⁰⁴ As early as 1851 two authoritative writers stated that Thompson had given accurate portrayals of Georgia piney woods characters.³⁰⁵ Civilization and public schools, observed another, were "destroying the originals from which its portraiture was taken."³⁰⁶ The author of *Kups of Kauphy* declared that Thompson had "faithfully chronicled the actings and doings in Pineville."³⁰⁷ The *Courtship* has been accepted as revealing the life of a middle-class Georgia planter of the period when the railroads were being built in the state,³⁰⁸ and has been praised for its natural and faithful picture of country life in a primitive time.³⁰⁹ The diction has been pronounced a faultless representation of "cracker" language.³¹⁰ As late as the 1880's one writer found in the wilds of Georgia "just such uncultured and uncouth men and women as Thompson had described."³¹¹ Another reviewer stated that the *Courtship* contained "that profound philosophy which displays a thorough knowledge of human nature."³¹² Thompson has rightly been called an important precursor of modern local color writers.³¹³ William Hamilton Hayne praised Thompson's characters as "flesh and blood creations" which "are not unworthy of comparison with some of the greater, but less realistic character-sketches of

304. There is at least one exception to this point of view. A reviewer in *The Magnolia; or Southern Appalachian*, II, (n. s.) 399 (June, 1843), considered the *Courtship* "a series of charcoal sketches of low life, abounding in extravagances . . . one great, gross caricature."

305. "Uncle Solon" in *Spirit of the Times*, XXI, 79 (April 5, 1851), cited by Blair, *Native American Humor*, 66. "Uncle Solon" was Solon Robinson. According to T. A. Burke, Thompson's "pictures of Georgia life are true to nature, and prove him to be not inferior in that line, to Longstreet, the celebrated author of *Georgia Scenes*." T. A. Burke, ed., *Polly Peablossom's Wedding* (Philadelphia, 1851) 24.

306. New Orleans *Crescent*, quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, May 15, 1857.

307. *Kups of Kauphy*, p [v].

308. Meine, *Tall Tales of the Southwest*, xvi. See also a newspaper clipping by Dr. R. J. Massey in the Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook.

309. The nostalgic editor of the Brunswick, Georgia, *Advertiser*, puts it thus: "No one has ever in style and simplicity approached Major Jones in giving to the world an idea of the manners and customs of Georgia farmers before the introduction of railroads and other high-fangled notions." Quoted in *Savannah Morning News*, August 29, 1880. Professor John Herbert Nelson makes this summary: "His [Thompson's] humorous volumes dealing with Major Jones not only entertained two or three generations of American readers but retain some permanent value as a record of provincial society." *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1936), XVIII, 480.

310. Hayne, in *The American*, V, 24 (October 21, 1882).

311. Gray, in the Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook.

312. "A. H. S." in reviewing the 1872 Appleton edition of the *Courtship* (Wall T. Thompson Scrapbook).

313. Trent, *Southern Writers*, 253.

Dickens."³¹⁴ Joel Chandler Harris saw in the *Courtship* "the only prose pastoral in our literature, and one of the first, if not the very first, contributions to a distinctive American literature."³¹⁵ The characters were so true to general rural life that Harris found their prototypes in a Vermont village.³¹⁶ To him Major Jones was "a character study unsurpassed in our literature."³¹⁷ All of these interpretations corroborate Professor Wilt's emphasis on the realism found in Thompson and other writers of antebellum American humor:

The authors [Thompson, Seba Smith, G. W. Harris, and others] were trying to create natural American characters and to give pictures of the American scene In these informal and sometimes despised books we have genuine American characters, not the slightly disguised figures taken from English fiction which appear in all but the very best novels of the period, for their authors were freed from the sentimentality and elegance that dominated the more ambitious writers. In short, these humorists were our first realists.³¹⁸

A book so popular as *Major Jones's Courtship* would almost certainly have had some influence upon later authors who were interested in Southern humor and local color; but irrefutable proof on this point is difficult to obtain. James W. Davidson, a contemporary of Thompson and a scholar who had a wide acquaintance with Southern literature, stated positively in 1869 that various imitations followed the *Courtship* but that none reached the original.³¹⁹ The editor of the *Brunswick Advertiser* declared that many writers followed in Thompson's footsteps but that none had succeeded so well in delineating the manners and customs of Georgia farmers.³²⁰ Neither commentator, however, offered concrete evidence. The anonymous author of *Kups of Kauphy*, after paying tribute to Longstreet and Thompson, declared that he was following in their footsteps and that he too sought "to let nature speak for herself."³²¹ One of his sketches contains a portrait and various stories about "Old Jack C-," the famous Negro waiter in Madison who was both witty and grandiloquent.³²² Much of this sketch is merely an expansion

314. Hayne, in *The American*, V, 24 (October 21, 1882).

315. Editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution*, quoted by the *Savannah Morning News*, March 29, 1882.

316. Julia Collier Harris, ed., *Joel Chandler Harris, Editor and Essayist*, 162.

317. *Atlanta Constitution*, September 28, 1879, cited by Blair, *Native American Humor*, 138.

318. Wilt, *Some American Humorists*, xi.

319. Davidson, *Living Writers of the South*, 574.

320. *Brunswick, Georgia, Advertiser*, quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, August 29, 1880. The same idea is expressed in the *Savannah Morning News*, Supplement, January 15, 1876.

321. *Kups of Kauphy*, p. vii.

322. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-107.

of Thompson's account of the major's visit to a hotel in Madison.³²³ Miss Tandy has pointed out that Bill Arp and his family and friends are as clear a series of portraits as Major Jones and his family.³²⁴ Professor Blair believes that Bill Arp continued the tradition which Thompson began in Major Jones³²⁵ and that Richard Malcolm Johnston followed him in employing the vernacular in story-telling.³²⁶ Mr. De Voto has pointed out the personal relations and literary influence of Thompson on Joel Chandler Harris.³²⁷ It is reasonable to believe that Thompson's great popularity had considerable influence upon many of the later local colorists, for in the *Courtship* is to be found the first full picture of family and community life in provincial middle Georgia.

All the evidence presented in this article indicates that William Tappan Thompson, following Seba Smith and other authors who wrote letters in the vernacular, succeeded in his original aim of amusing a rural middle Georgia community by writing about its social and domestic life from the point of view of a middle class farmer. The author was unprepared for the nation-wide popularity which followed his homespun letters based primarily on topical materials indigenous to middle Georgia. The many letters reprinted in newspapers and the almost endless number of editions of the book, which remained in print for over half a century, made Major Jones one of the best known comic figures in nineteenth century American humor. He should be considered first as a full length individual portrait of a middle Georgia farmer, second as a crackerbox philosopher and representative of plebeian attitudes in ante-bellum Georgia, and finally as a politician. Variety in action is achieved by practical jokes, by the details of ordinary family life, by community activities such as coon hunts, militia drills, and patriotic oratory, and by a rustic's observations on his travels. Much of the humor in *Major Jones's Courtship* is to be found in the accurate representation of the Georgia cracker dialect. The Southern word coinage, the peculiar rustic phrasing, and the earthy metaphorical language add materially to the amusing qualities of the book.

323. *Courtship*, Letter VII.

324. Tandy, *Crackerbox Philosophers*, 116.

325. Blair, *Native American Humor*, 105.

326. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

327. De Voto, *Mark Twain's America*, 97. Corroboration for this opinion is found in Robert Lemuel Wiggins, *The Life of Joel Chandler Harris* (Nashville, 1918), 112-13 and in J. C. Derby, *Fifty Years Among Authors, Books and Publishers* (New York, 1883), 437.

The first readers praised the volume for its laughter-provoking characteristics—its humor of topical events, its humor of provincial life, its humor of character, its humor of diction, its humor of crackerbox philosophizing. Presently, however, commentators, though admitting its value as humorous writing, began emphasizing its realism in character, incident, and dialect and stressing its value as social history, local color, and truthful crackerbox philosophizing. Critics have stated that imitations followed *Major Jones's Courtship*, and there is obviously palpable influence to be found in *Kups of Kauphy*. More recent scholars have suggested that Charles Henry Smith, Richard Malcolm Johnston, and Joel Chandler Harris were following in Thompson's footsteps. Where Jack Downing is impudent and primarily interested in politics, Major Jones is naive and comments on community and family life. He is a middle class Georgia backwoods farmer, and not the poor white frequently found in Longstreet. Drunkenness, gambling, crude jokes, and fist fights are rarely found in Major Jones's world; the language and antics of the ring-tailed roarer are absent. Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood would be out of place in the moral and respectable community of Pineville, where the crudeness present is due primarily to a lack of education and where Major Jones's preachments represent the moral-minded, common-sense attitude of the people. *Major Jones's Courtship*, in brief, should be considered as an outstanding example of popular ante-bellum American humor, as a rare instance of serious crackerbox philosophizing in the Old South, as convincing comic portraiture, as accurate provincial social history, as significant local color, and as an important illustration of pre-Civil War tendencies towards realism.

